Drag Queens Make a Difference in the Desert

The 6th Annual Queen of the Desert was held on May 31 at the Palm Springs Cultural Center.

June 5, 2019 By Jennifer Morton

The 6th Annual Queen of the Desert was held on May 31 at the Palm Springs Cultural Center in California. This year's drag pageant featured five contestants: Angelique VaGorgeous, Anya, Kourtanay Caliente, Sadie Ladie and Sheena Wolfe. As in many pageants, each contestant was judged on her performance, her appearance in the resort wear/bathing suit and evening gown competitions and her talent.

But this was no ordinary beauty pageant. It was also a fundraiser for the Desert AIDS Project, Coachella Valley's main resource for those living with, affected by or at risk for HIV/AIDS. In order to qualify to compete, each contestant had to pledge to raise a minimum of $1,000 for the organization. Prior to the event, each queen competed for votes online (every $5 donation equaled one vote) in the hope of raising the most money and winning Fan Favorite. Voting remained open during the first half of the evening so attendees could also vote for their favorite queen in person.

Drag queens have been at the forefront of fundraising for the Desert AIDS Project. Celebrity judges Dottie DuBois and Maude Chapeau of Les Dames du Soleil were two early advocates for the organization and helped raise the first $1 million that kick-started the nonprofit.

Rounding out the star-studded judging panel were Deven Green, Joey English and Ruta Lee, who was brought up onstage to celebrate her 84th birthday.

The sold-out event was cohosted by Jeffrey Ewell and Brian Wanzek (Bella da Ball) who promised the audience over-the-top group numbers. But first, it was time for the bathing suit competition. As the girls strutted across the stage, the audience learned a bit more about each contestant and why they were competing for the crown and lending their support to the Desert AIDS Project.

While the contestants were preparing for the talent portion of the evening, Anita Molly and Ollota Enchilada (aka Desert AIDS Project board member Mark Hamilton and his partner Juan Francisco) transfixed the audience with their performance of "The Phantom of the Opera." The pair was later honored with the Show Stopper award.

Then it was time for the queens to lip-synch for their lives—or at least the crown. All except

Kourtanay Caliente, who chose to actually belt out “I Know Where I’ve Been” from the musical Hairspray and received a standing ovation for her vocal efforts. The other queens provided ample competition, and, as promised, over-the-top group numbers did not disappoint.

Special guest star Morgan McMichaels channeled her inner bitch and did a spot-on impersonation of Dynasty’s Alexis Carrington Colby before the queens took the stage to model their best evening wear.

While the judges tallied their votes and fan favorite donations were counted, reigning queen Lola performed “I Wanna Dance With Somebody” by Whitney Houston. (Fortunately, several somebodies—in the form of sexy backup dancers—were happy to join her.) After her performance, Palm Springs Mayor Robert Moon presented Lola with a certificate of recognition from the city to honor her past year’s work as an ambassador for the Desert AIDS Project.

Finally, it was time to announce the winners. Angelique VaGorgeous was awarded sashes for Best Bathing Suit and Best Evening Wear. Best Performance went to Anya and Fan Favorite went to Sadie Ladie.

And the Queen of the Desert was…drumroll, please…Anya!

The crowd rose to its feet as the new queen was crowned. As an ambassador for the Desert AIDS Project, Anya continues in the long tradition of drag queens raising HIV awareness, entertaining audiences and supporting worthy causes. Long live the queens!



Meet the contestants of the 2019 Queen of the Desert Jennifer Morton

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/drag-queens-make-difference-desert